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## HARRY LAMONT

HARRY LAMONT is dead. The news moved me to tears. It was as though a vital part of my sensory system had been excised. For Harry Lamont was, so to speak, my early mentor in the harsh and beautiful realities of life.

I met Harry Lamont personally only five months ago. But under the *nom de plume* of Wilfred St Mandé, he had made himself known to me many years earlier. Perhaps that is why the articles he sent me only this year appealed to me so much. How ironical! Harry Lamont, my first Freethought teacher, submitting articles to me in my newly acquired capacity as editor of the world's only Freethought weekly.

I was a late reader and fed on juvenile trivia well into my teens. I was still reading Enid Blyton when I was twelve and at thirteen and fourteen I read the adventures of Biggles and that was about all. I did very little reading and what little I read should have been left behind several years earlier. Even childhood classics I avoided like the plague as being too 'advanced', too 'difficult'. I hated looking words up in a dictionary. That was far too tedious.

One day I was at my grandfather's house. He had very few books of his own and most of these I suspect had not been touched for years. I was idly looking through them and, being fourteen, the title of one caught my attention. *War, Wine and Women*. I glanced at one or two pages. What initially attracted me were the passages on sex and the horrors of war. Much of it was so simply, though so vividly, written that I felt here, for the first time, was an 'adult' novel that I could read, understand in the main, and enjoy. Some of it was horrible but compelling reading. Like this piece —

Slowly but surely the great day dawned, and we stood tense and pale, ready to go over the top once more. For days our guns had been plastering the German lines with shells of every calibre, and on the morning of the attack the drum-

fire was perfectly hellish. Jerry replied and we were in an inferno of flying clods, whizzing metal, and terrific explosions. Hill stood on my left and Tyler on my right. We were white and shivering. A shell blew the grave-digger to pieces and his brains hit me in the face while his blood gave me a shower bath. The blast of the explosion blew me to the floor, where I lay stunned and cowed. Bits of Tyler were lying near me and his pulverised head was touching my feet. The thud of the guns was like an army of giants pounding the ground; I was crazy with terror and my limbs twitched convulsively as I struggled to my feet. It was as if the earth were coming to pieces, whirling into fragments. Thick smoke drifted over the battle-field and the hellish bursts of shrapnel just over our heads made us crouch. Hill was sobbing: "O Christ, will it never stop? I'm going bloody mad . . . O God! Stop them guns . . . I must run away . . . I can't stand it . . . O Jesus, have mercy on me. . . ."

I found out after his death that he was a Roman Catholic. It was easy to see that he was going mad; he shrieked and screamed like a demented person. Then I realised he was indeed demented, for he flung down his rifle and ran. The company commander shot him dead with his revolver, fearing a stampede.

Corporal Acres was smashed up by a bomb and his bloody remains lay in the trench. The trunk was more or less intact, but the legs were severed and the head flattened. The clothing was torn off in places and his belly, muddy and bloody, looked horrible. I turned my eyes away and saw Tyler's buttocks, also bare and bloody.

I asked my grandfather if I might borrow the book. He looked at me as though he were about to connive at an illicit event. "It's a bit old for you," he said. "Go on, Granddad," I urged. So he relented, simply insisting that I returned the book.

I read it. As a boy of fourteen the passages on love and sex moved and excited me and opened up a wonderful new area of sensation. For the first time in my life I felt I knew what love for a woman must be like. I felt sympathy for the power of manly lust. And as I read so much of affection and kindness and understanding I felt temporarily infused with these hitherto almost unknown virtues. And throughout the book, midst all the horror and exquisite beauty and uplifting ideas, there was humour in abundance. And I laughed and laughed and laughed.

*War, Wine and Women* gripped me. I did not understand it all. But what I could understand I read again and again. Here, for the first time, I read criticism of the Christian God and discovered that some of my worst doubts about this awe-inspiring being were clearly shared by someone else — someone, moreover, whose judgment I felt to be sound. This was an enormous relief to me. I was at the age when young teenagers worry about all sorts of things. And I was somewhat troubled about disbelieving so much of what my betters had told and were continuing to tell me about the Almighty. Harry Lamont,

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or Wilfred St Mandé as he then was to me, eased my worry. He did more than this for me. He opened to me a whole new world of ideas, of thinking and questioning.

Harry Lamont wrote passionately about the horrors of war. One passage, full of compassion such as no Christian priest intoning his vitriolic war prayers could have had, impressed me immensely.

Once again the sun rose, tinting the light clouds with the most delicate pink and gold tracery. It suffused the sky like the blush on the face of a beautiful woman. Far above the inferno a lark sang, oblivious of man's insanity. I tried to take off my boots but the foot had swollen, and I had to cut slits in the sides. When I moved my toes the blood started to flow anew and oozed out of the cuts. I had eaten the dead man's iron rations and my own, but in each case they consisted of nothing but a few small biscuits, the bully beef having disappeared. My face and hands were encrusted with dry mud; I trembled from weakness and wondered if I were going to die. My wounds worried me, for they were dirty, and I was afraid of blood-poisoning or tetanus. I found a cigarette in my pocket, but was afraid to smoke it, in case it drew a shower of bombs.

At about three in the afternoon a badly wounded Jerry crawled into the hole, and was startled when he saw a live Englishman there. He had a murderous-looking knife in his hand, but he threw it away when I asked him in German if he intended killing a wounded man. In any case I could have got the better of him, for he had lost his left leg and was dragging a bloody stump. He had also been hit in the body and his torn tunic was covered with blood. I examined his body and saw he had not many more hours in this world. There was a big shrapnel wound in the middle of the chest and part of

the entrails were visible where a piece of steel had torn the stomach. He asked me if he was going to die, and I tried to comfort him by saying that he might pull through.

I questioned him and found that he was nineteen and had been a student at Bonn when the war broke out; he enlisted on his eighteenth birthday and the Somme was his first experience of battle. He was a delicate-looking youth and told me he was studying art. I liked his face, which was handsome and frank. I had four tablets of morphia left and gave him two. He died with his head on my knees, his hands in mine. I looked at his fair features, composed in death, and imagined him, rucksack on back and staff in hand, wandering through the peaceful lanes of old Germany, singing, sketching, and after a long tramp over dusty roads and verdant meadows, resting for a drink of beer at an old rustic inn. My heart was full of a great bitterness when I reflected that he was one of the Boches, the blond beasts who were out to destroy civilisation, massacre little children, and violate women . . . according to the politicians and journalists. I am not trying to pretend that the Germans were all angels, far from it. But in the aggregate they were guilty of no more crimes than the French or British. I shall never forget a regular sergeant who always said: "We would have done just what they did, if we had had the chance".

Harry Lamont, schoolmaster extraordinary, had the enviable ability to write simply and vividly and succinctly and interestingly and, need I add, well. We have lost a great Freethinker.

*War, Wine and Women* was first published by Cassell & Co. in 1931 and went through several editions.

Harry Lamont

## Speaking Personally

MANY RELIGIONS claim that the founders worked miracles. It is strange that the supernatural agency that raised the dead, turned water into wine, fed the multitude with magic loaves and fishes, cured the sick and gave sight to the blind packed up long ago and no longer functions.

Miracles are supposed to happen at Lourdes in the south of France. Trains full of stricken wretches arrive there daily from all over the world. Stacks of crutches testify to the cures. Shops that sell candles, crucifixes, rosaries and other holy objects do a roaring trade.

With a vast throng I queued up to pass through the miraculous grotto and kiss the wall, but it looked dirty and greasy so I merely pretended to kiss. But I knelt outside with the throng, arms outstretched, rosary on wrist. A friend who witnessed the performance subsequently called me a sanguinary hypocrite, but I merely retorted that when in Lourdes one must do as the devout do.

Later on I saw the two fat jovial priests boozing in a small discreet tavern. What a startling transformation!

Many people imagine they are paralysed, and need only a traumatic shock to restore them to normal health. A doctor told me about a boy of twelve who was wheeled in in a bath-chair, because he had lost the use of his legs. The medical man suspected the patient merely needed a shock, so said to him "If your legs are no use I shall have to cut them off". Gradually the child was persuaded to stand and walk. In a few days he was running about the tennis court, picking up the balls for the doctors.

It is marvellous what auto-suggestion can do. On my way home from the Far East I called at the Holy Land.

## MIRACLES

An old woman in England, crippled by rheumatism, had asked me to bring her a bottle of water from the Jordan. I promised to do so, but forgot. On arriving home I saw the ancient dame in her garden and felt a twinge of conscience. I hurried indoors, found a lemonade bottle, filled it under a tap, screwed in the top and took it to the wizened crone who accepted it joyfully. She was particularly gratified at being told that it had been blessed by the high priest. Three months later, while pruning her roses, she told me her rheumatism had entirely disappeared.

All over the world charlatans batten on human credulity. Chemists' shops are full of nostrums that claim to cure all ills. A woman lent me a book in which I read that flowers picked in the sun with the dew still on them will effect miraculous cures. She was obviously annoyed when I scoffed at her naïveté.

In Jamaica and Africa I saw evidence of the apparent miracle that witch doctors and medicine men can work in dealing with simple people. When a victim is told he will die in say three days, he duly gives up the ghost at the appointed time. Sometimes I tried to talk the doomed person out of it, but to no avail.

Whenever I hear of a miraculous happening I endeavour to trace it to its source. Like the Indian rope trick, most miracles when investigated dissolve into thin air. Carlyle said a pair of trousers is a miracle, but religious folk use the word in a different way, to imply supernatural interference with natural laws.

When I was a student in France a rogue claiming to work miracles had great success. He used to ask cripples to hobble up to the platform. He prayed for them and they appeared to be cured. They threw down their crutches, danced for joy and thanked their benefactor. He was sub-



sequently sent to prison for fraud. The alleged cures were bogus; the "cripples" had been his accomplices.

Christian Scientists believe in miracles. In their opinion disease and pain don't exist, they are merely errors of the mortal senses. I lodged with a couple of Christian Scientists whom I annoyed by reciting:

"There was a faith healer of Deal  
Who said, 'Although pain isn't real,  
When I sit on a pin,  
And it punctures the skin,  
I dislike what I fancy I feel'."

In South Africa I reviewed a book called *The Faith? Falsity and Failure of Christian Science*, by three professors who declared that America is dotted with the graves of little children killed by their parents who refused to call a doctor. Local Christian Scientists abused and attacked me vigorously. They fiercely resent criticism. As H. A. L. Fisher asserted, the creed in question is neither Christian nor scientific. In so far as it works it is merely applied psychology.

In India certain rivers like the Ganges are supposed to work miraculous cures. I watched people bathing in the sacred waters and drinking them while corpses floated by.

Parsons waste an appalling amount of time fulminating that the miracles actually happened. We are told they don't happen now because we are too wicked and indifferent to true religion. It is a pity that miracles have gone out of fashion, for a dramatic miracle, duly authenticated, would impress people and bring them to salvation.

## A JUROR LOOKS AT THE LAW

LIKE having an accident, serving on a jury is something one tends to think of as applying to other people rather than to oneself. So I was disagreeably surprised to receive a Juror's citation from the Sheriff Clerk.

Not being pregnant or suffering from 'other feminine condition or ailment unfitting me for the time being from serving on a jury', I had no alternative but to present myself at the appointed time at the Sheriff Court House. At ten-thirty o'clock forenoon the Sheriff Clerk called the roll, men first and then women, but otherwise in random order just as the names had come out of the hat. Mine was the very last to be called as I might have known it would be had I realised the significance of being No. 50 on List of Assize.

When the Sheriff came in clad in wig and gown, we were told to stand. When he sat down, we did likewise. The Clerk held up a glass jar which might once have contained boiled sweets but which now contained fifty pieces of paper bearing our names. He juggled them about a bit. 'Will those jurors whose names I call out come up to the front and go into the jury box?'

The first name he drew out was that of the man sitting on my left. My neighbour pushed his way out and took his seat in the jury box. I held my breath as each succeeding name was called to the full complement of fifteen. Mine was not among them.

The Clerk turned to the ladies and gentlemen in the jury box. 'As I call your name, will you please stand?' Then he went through the names in the same order as they came out of the jar and in which they were seated in three rows of five. 'Will you all raise your right hand?' He then recited

People like to believe in miracles. In an Irish church I was shown the mummy of a boy whose father killed him by a blow on the napper from an axe. The body lies in a glass case and has been miraculously preserved.

When I watched fire-walking, a friend of mine said it was a miracle that their feet were not burnt. I agreed that the phenomenon is a puzzling one, but I don't believe there is any supernatural intervention. The solution to the mystery eludes me, but I am convinced there is a rational explanation.

Auto-suggestion can produce results that seem miraculous. In a South African boarding house I arranged that a dozen persons were to say to a young man, "Are you ill? You don't look very well". Such phrases were said to him at intervals until he caught his bus at 8.30 a.m. Two hours later he returned to his room and went to bed.

Some people consider ghostly apparitions miraculous, which reminds me of an old farmer in the north of England who used to stagger home half-sozzled every night after a sojourn in the boozier. His way led him through a cemetery and a young fellow decided to frighten him by pretending to be a ghost, so at midnight, covered by a sheet, he rose from a tombstone and made ghostly noises. The ancient roisterer gazed at him, grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, belaboured him with a cudgel and growled: "I'll teach thee ter be out of thy grave at this time of the neet".

Enid Rob

the oath. As the jury were thus collectively sworn in, it would scarcely be possible for any individual juror who happened not to believe in God to make a different affirmation.

Turning to the rest of us, the Sheriff Clerk said: 'Those jurors whose services have not been required are now free to leave if they wish'. Most of the 35 rejected—but not dejected—jurors did so wish.

In these days of Organisation and Methods study, one cannot but wonder whether it is really necessary to require the attendance of 50 busy people when only 15 have to serve. Some may have journeyed 60 miles from the far end of the county just to answer their names. When travel was slower and (in some ways) more hazardous than it is today, the calling of 50 people may have been justified to ensure that as many as 15 arrived safely. But if every Rugby fifteen travelled to matches with two complete teams of reserves plus five extras in attendance just to be on the safe side, one would think the Rugby authorities stark, staring mad. Surely, it would be sufficient if 15 reserves presented themselves at the Sheriff Court?

And seeing that lots are to be cast to determine who exactly is to serve on the jury, could not this be done beforehand when the original 50 are chosen? So then those called would know their time would not be wasted. Does the present uncertainty further the cause of justice? Is it any more likely that 15 certain jurors from all the airts will be got at than that 50 possibles will be got at by the accused or his friends—if that is the fear?

Never having been in court before, I stayed behind to watch the proceedings for a while. A man and a woman,



under the escort respectively of a policeman and a policewoman, were in the dock charged with hire purchase frauds. The dock, incidentally, wasn't really an enclosure, but a similar bench to what the rest of us were sitting on.

A young woman entered the pulpit-like structure which was the witness-box. She looked around her in bewildered fashion, wondering what to do with her handbag before deciding to put it on the floor as she clung to the sides of the box. The Sheriff spoke to the witness. 'Will you repeat after me? I swear by Almighty God.'

'I swear by Almighty God.'

'As I shall appear before Him on the Last Day . . . to answer for my actions, . . . I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth . . .'

She gave her evidence. The judge told her to speak up. 'The jury have to hear what you're saying.'

When she had finished, the manager of the defrauded shop entered the witness box to take the oath and give evidence.

It seemed to me that witnesses might be given more consideration. Actors, ministers, priests, politicians, lawyers, lecturers would no doubt feel at home in the witness box. But for the ordinary person, it must be a considerable ordeal to have to stand up and expatiate in public. One is not surprised to read newspaper stories of witnesses fainting. The surprise is that it doesn't happen more frequently. Should not they be allowed to sit and should not the judge and jury be sufficiently near to permit the witness to use an ordinary speaking voice?

With regard to taking the oath, the Sheriff appears to assume that the witness believes in the existence of Almighty God and in the day of Judgment. Should not he at least give him or her the option of affirming? The fact that he takes the oath for granted makes it difficult for an unbeliever to exercise his right to affirm. It would take some courage to halt the Sheriff in full spate.

Is it thought that people are more likely to speak the truth if they take the oath than if they affirm—regardless of whether or not they believe in God? A clerk with many years experience of court proceedings has expressed the view that witnesses told just as much of the truth as suited them. Is there really any means of ensuring that the truth is being told or that the judge and jury can distinguish with certainty between truth and falsehood, either deliberate or the result of a romanticizing or unreliable memory?

Barbara Wootton has learnt from forty years' experience as a magistrate 'the impossibility of detecting a liar by his manner or appearance, and the desirability of watching the reactions of witnesses who have already given their evidence to the testimony of those who follow them. Headshakings and spontaneous expressions of astonishment on the part of the former sometimes give a valuable clue to the veracity of the latter'. She suggests that 'the conventions of advocacy may in time be modified so as to exclude the grosser distortions now commonly practised'. (*In a World I Never Made*, p. 238-9.)

In a story in *The Scotsman* (Feb. 1, 1967) in which the High Court of Justiciary decided that an acquitted man could be charged with perjury, Mr R. A. Bennett, QC for the accused said, 'There must have been thousands of cases where everyone present was perfectly aware a person had given a false denial on oath'. If this is so, it might be as well to abandon the farce of oath-taking, which can only be valuable if taken seriously. And no form of words

could prevent an imperfect recollection from distorting the facts.

My first juror's citation was received some years ago; my second, just before Christmas when my mind was much exercised as to what the case would be. A man and woman had been taken into custody in connection with a death. One inferred it was the death of a mentally defective baby. Would this be the case? The time-lag in court proceedings might well preclude this.

But supposing it *were* this case. Could you find a parent guilty of a mongol's death when you believe that euthanasia should be available in such circumstances? No parents should be forced to shoulder this intolerable burden. When a man was liable to the death penalty for stealing a sheep, did not juries refuse to bring in a verdict of 'Guilty' and so eventually were responsible for a change in the law? Should not the same apply today in those spheres where the law lags behind thoughtful opinion? Law after all is not of supernatural origin but is created by the society in which it operates, though that society may be represented legally by basically unreflecting middle-aged, middle-class people. However difficult to bring about and however slow the process may be, the law is not incapable of change. And the fact that a majority verdict and even a non-proven verdict are permissible in Scotland at least allows the juror to act in accordance with his conscience rather than to be bullied by the rest of the jury in the interests of a unanimous verdict.

Another case that came up in Scotland recently was that of a doctor charged with procuring two abortions. Many people think that a woman should not be forced to bear a child against her will. Many think that *any* registered medical practitioner should be legally permitted to terminate pregnancy, abortion being illegal only if performed by an unqualified person. Therefore, a juror holding these opinions should find a doctor 'not guilty' of criminal abortion.

In cases where pregnancy has been terminated with the consent of the woman concerned and on her initiative, if a crime has been committed, is she not an accomplice? But, in Britain at any rate, she is herself never prosecuted whether she has aborted herself or whether someone else has aborted her at her request. This is a tacit recognition that a woman does, after all, have some rights over her own body. At the same time, it involves an injustice to the other party who is liable to imprisonment. An injustice also in that in only a tiny fraction of putative cases is any action taken. Justice is manifestly seen *not* to be done, or at any rate, to be very arbitrary.

In the evening papers of Feb. 17, 1967, we read the following: 'A doctor who did two abortions was jailed for four years when he appeared for sentence in the High Court in Edinburgh today'. This is the sort of thing that brings the law into disrepute—that a man should be sent to prison for an action which few people would regard as a genuine crime.

'The Solicitor-General, Mr H. S. Wilson, QC, said today that the two charges of criminal abortion were uncovered as a result of "admirable patience and conscientious police work".' Does not this bring the police into disrepute—that they should waste their time tracking down matters of this kind instead of concerning themselves with real crime? The abortionist, even if he operates for gain, is at least



## THE LAW OF GOD: III

A. C. Thompson

A SET of laws given by God himself must be the very best laws there can possibly be, one should think, far better than any laws we humans make. Let us now examine the Divine Law revealed to the human race in the person of Moses, by the Supreme Lord and Judge of the universe, so that we may admire it and erect it as a model for our own enacted law, if indeed human law is required to supplement a Divine Law from God himself.

First comes the ethical portion of the law, Ex. 20, 1 to Ex. 24, 11, concerned with moral conduct and human relations, as distinct from religious ceremonial law, which fills the rest of the Book of Exodus to the end, and the whole of the Book of Leviticus. In his first commandment, Yhwh demands worship of himself only and of no other god. He thus acknowledges that there were other gods, as indeed there were—Baal, and Marduk and Moloch, and others. Yhwh was the tribal god of the Hebrews, with no better claim to reality than any other. From a philosophical view, a first cause would not necessarily require worship, for human worship could add nothing to him, not even pleasure; from the new Social-Survival theory of ethics we learn that religious worship is a requirement, not of god, but of society, for it is a tribalism which serves to unite individuals into a cohesive social group. Consider here the infinite divine wisdom of a threat to punish "unto the third and fourth generation" (20, 5) and the infinite divine justice of punishing a child for the sin of his great-great-grandfather. Behold the second Commandment (20, 7), which even today prevents us from knowing the name of this god, and compels me here to write it as Yhwh. Throughout the Old Testament, the Sabbath is a tabooed day (20, 8-11). The rest of the Commandments (honour parents, refrain from murder, adultery, deceit, theft, lust and greed, 12-17), are nothing more or different than what is in every human law, even the most primitive or savage, anywhere in the world; these are the common agreement of all men on morality, without the Hebrew revelation. Similar laws were in the code of Hammurabi, 900 years before Moses.

But Yhwh gave at this time not Ten Commandments only, but four whole chapters, and we pass on to other laws of this just god who damns all humanity through the ages for one sin of eating a forbidden fruit. The Law of God recognises slavery, even enslavement of one's own countrymen (21, 2). Out of the mouth of the loving Father comes a sublime recognition that a man may sell his own daughter into slavery (21, 7). And the girl's new master may use her sexually (21, 8). Or he may give her to his son for a sex-partner (21, 9). The slave-owner is commanded to separate a freed slave from his wife and children (21, 4); and if the slave does not wish to leave his wife and family, "his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him forever" (21, 5, 6). Divine law ordains that a man may kill his slave and not be punished "for he is his money" (21, 20, 21). Catholics may note that the Divine Law of God does not consider it murder to cause the death of an unborn child without hurting the mother (21, 22, 23). God here enacts the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (21, 23-27). Animals are culpable and punishable for crime (21, 28). It is our duty to kill every witch; we must not let one remain alive (22, 18). Many old ladies have deservedly been tortured to death in obedience to this wise law. Throughout the law, God commands no end of sacrifices—the

Book of Leviticus is full of them—but here he also commands human sacrifice: "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors; the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen and with thy sheep" (22, 29, 30).

One may read for himself the remainder of these primitive, barbarous divine laws of God, through the rest of Exodus and through Leviticus. Yhwh established trial by ordeal for a woman suspected by her husband of infidelity: the jealous husband shall bring her to the priest, with an offering, and the priest shall cause her to drink holy water made with the sweepings from the floor; if she gets sick, she is guilty (Num. 5, 12-31). One may judge for himself, by looking at what the law contains, whether it is divine, whether its author is an almighty God, or whether it is a mass of savage and superstitious rules, rituals and rubbish.

Morality is held to come from God in two ways: revelation and reason. Revelation is a direct message from God to some favoured person, found usually in a book such as the Bible, Koran, Book of Mormon, etc. Some believers adhere to revelation and exclude reason as a source of moral principle; they seek to settle every issue by an appeal to their book, whether it be the Bible, the Koran, or whatever, and refuse to consider an argument regarding morals not based on the book even though such argument is a religious one starting with the assumption of the divine origin of morals. Thus, it has been argued for example that it is immoral to cut off the tails of dogs, horses, and other animals, because the Bible declares that "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder". Those who rely solely on revelation and reject reason do believe that it was God who gave men reason, and usually believe further that it is precisely this gift of reason which makes man superior to animal and plant creation, but they nevertheless object to man's use of his reason and disavow it at least as a source of religious or moral knowledge. Other ecclesiastics have recognised that faith must be justified to and by reason.

Ethics, the systematic rational study of human morals, began with Socrates in ancient Greece, over 400 years before Christ. He was followed not only by Plato and Aristotle, but also by two schools of moral philosophy. The Cyrenaics proposed the doctrine that good is the same as pleasure; this theory is called Hedonism. The other school, the Cynics, maintained that pleasure is not in any way related to goodness; the good man rejects the pursuit of pleasure, is independent of wants, is the master rather than the servant of his passions. The Cyrenaics were followed by the Epicureans, who held that the great end and aim of all human acts is indeed pleasure, but that the best and most enduring pleasure is found not in gratifications, in honour, virtue, but kindness, success, high esteem, wisdom. The Cynics were succeeded by the Stoics, who developed the doctrine of natural law: that there exist natural laws of morality knowable to reason, and that the good life is that lived in accord with nature. For them, morality was rational rather than affective; the universe is ruled by laws of nature which human beings must recognise and to which they must conform. 'To live according to nature' was their formula for the good life. Human morality should avoid feelings and desires, and should instead be directed at fulfillment of duty imposed by the natural law. These two schools of ancient Greek thought have profoundly influenced subsequent ethical philosophy.



Hedonism enlarged in the last century or so to universal Hedonism or Utilitarianism, which advocates the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, not individual pleasure but universal pleasure. Stoicism, on the other hand, has formed a basis for mediaeval Christian ethical philosophy, Scholasticism, which adapted the principle of natural law to link natural philosophy with theology. This religious system of ethical theory, based on the Stoic idea of a law of nature, was reasoned by churchmen of the Middle Ages, the mediaeval 'schoolmen' or 'scholastics' as they were called, of whom St Thomas Aquinas was perhaps most notable. Much of the religious doctrine, the theology, of modern Christian churches is of this origin; it is contained particularly in the tremendous series of books written by St Thomas, the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

Morality, in the view of St Thomas, is founded on the notion of law. He distinguished sorts of law: eternal law would still exist if God had never created anything; divine law is God's will for his creation, and is practically equivalent to the divine will; natural law is that in accordance with which all things in the universe operate; moral law is that which must control human actions, not necessarily that which human beings enact. The argument, briefly, is that God created, and governs, the universe in accordance with his will, the eternal and divine laws, which are all part of the nature or essence of God. Natural laws, or laws of nature, those which rule the phenomena of the universe, must all follow from the eternal-divine law. Moral laws, which rule human acts, must follow from divine and natural laws.

An illuminating application of this theory is the Roman Catholic ruling on birth control. The natural function of the sex organs is undoubtedly the procreation of children; the pleasure of the act is a mere concomitant, for it is absurd to suppose that God has created a function which serves no other purpose than to afford pleasure for its performance. Procreation of children is thus the end, or divine purpose, of the sex act according to the natural law, and hence according to the divine law. It is therefore clear that it is the will of God that sex relations should be allowed to lead to the production of new life. Hence, that which frustrates this natural sequence, such as contraception, is an interference with the divine law and the natural law and thus a clear violation of the moral law. Continence and celibacy, although they limit child-bearing, are not wrong because they do not contravene the divine or natural law, and performance of the act at times of female infertility is also not wrong, for the same reason. To this argument it has been replied that very many of man's tools and inventions frustrate natural processes and are not considered morally wrong. Water wets objects in accordance with natural law, and hence with divine or eternal law; hence, carrying an umbrella in the rain must be a sinful act, since it frustrates a natural process. The function of fire is to burn; hence, if a house is on fire, it is sinful to put it out.

I am trying, in these articles, to establish the true basis for human morality. I believe that honest recognition of the truths we live by is a first step towards better human relationships: towards a more rational sex life, reduction of crime and delinquency, abolition of prejudice, prevention of international conflict. I believe that the new Social-Survival theory of ethics holds the best promise, of any theory I know of, not only for explaining why we behave as moral human beings, but also for how we ought to

behave and why. The supernatural theory of morality is an opposed one; hence I do want to invite candid examination of the prevalent belief that morality is something dictated by the special revelation of an unseen spirit, or something which must conform to the will of an unseen spirit known otherwise than through revelation.

The Social-Survival theory of ethics defines morality as being concerned with social, rather than with individual behaviour; and it offers both rational and empirical proof for a basic law, as basic to ethics, sociology and jurisprudence as Newton's laws are to mechanics or Faraday's laws are to electrolysis, which may be simply stated thus: all moral behaviour is directed towards the survival of the agent's society. The standard which it offers for sexual morality is that of begetting and rearing society's new members, and it would base all marriage and divorce laws on this principle. It therefore approves contraception in the modern world, is indifferently to pornography, and it strongly condemns irresponsible sexual intercourse, promiscuity, illegitimacy and the breakdown of the family. It recognises especially the motive and cause of war as the moral necessity of preserving one's society. It claims to be the true, the universal and the ultimate ethical principle or moral standard, the logical imperative, recognised implicitly by all human beings through all ages of human existence.

The Social-Survival theory is not inconsistent with any natural-law theory, either religious or naturalistic. It does not deny natural laws according to which individuals or groups survive. The laws of nature prescribe the conduct which conduces to the survival of society. Thus, instead of quarrelling with natural-law theories, it specifies the natural law more explicitly and precisely. It is therefore not necessarily incompatible with supernaturalism. It does not logically or necessarily deny the existence of a God in the sense of a prime cause of the universe. It is surely true that nobody in this world knows exactly and certainly what has been the cause, if any, of the universe, and that he who attempts to teach another about the cause of the universe is teaching a subject about which he is as ignorant as anyone else. It may seem inconceivable to the human mind that this universe could exist without some cause; and it may be inconceivable further that this supposed cause could be any other than an intelligent one. Nor need the Social-Survival theory deny that this cause could have ordained human beings as they are with their propensities for social living. But the theory is independent of theology; it holds logically whether there is a God or not.

While it may be reasonable to concede that there may have been a cause of the universe, there is no evidence available at present about what this cause was, and whether it still exists or has quite expended its energy. It surely cannot be proved that the cause of the universe was the tribal God Yhwh of the Old Testament of the Bible. Nor can one continue to believe, in the light of scientific discoveries, or scientific theories if you prefer, in geology and palaeontology concerning the age of the earth, its past animal and plant life and the evolution of all forms of life, the Biblical story of the origin of the earth and its life. Few people, even among clergymen, seem to be defending this account of creation any more, but it is becoming considered poetry, or allegory, or myth. And without man's fall, there could be no redemption.

Nevertheless, there is no inconsistency in acceptance by a religious person of the Social-Survival principle of ethics.



Indeed, the principle is quite coherent with supernaturalism. If a God made the world and man, he made man a social being, adapted to living in societies, and he thus made human societies. He made all living things tend and strive to survive. The logical imperative of the Social-Survival principle can be regarded as part of the eternal law or divine law; it is surely part of natural law. It could be asserted that God made the survival of society a logical necessity and that he also made the laws which concern the means of survival. It could be maintained, if you please, that I am God's prophet revealing his eternal law—but I do not believe this myself, although it may be that I could claim as much right to this title as those other prophets.

(To be continued)

## THEATRE

David Tribe

**Aren't We All?** (Frederick Lonsdale), Savoy.

**Rafferty's Chant** (Keith Dewhurst), Mermaid.

**The Restoration of Arnold Middleton** (David Storey), Royal Court

ONE OF THE LATEST of the 'twenties revivals now capturing, if not captivating London is **Aren't We All?** which Lonsdale always considered his best play. Certainly it has the greatest pretensions to an underlying philosophy: not the "Aren't we all bloody old fools?" of the curtain line, but aren't we all vulnerable, guilty, deserving of pity and forgiveness. There are a wonderfully practical, humbugging vicar (George Howe) and his wife (Rosamond Burne), who is improbably redeemed in the last act. Some of the cynical lines of the noble lord who saves his son's marriage from the rocks of indiscretion by discovering a similar reef in his daughter-in-law's passage through Cairo, still raise a smile—but only just. Perhaps we have had in the interim too much social realism and *ciné=verité* for the aristocratic junketings of yesterday, decently castrated of real sex and passion, to have much impact. Director Joan Riley disposes her caste elegantly about the stage, but allows the machinery to move so slowly in the first two acts that Lonsdale's creaks really croak. The performers smile bravely or look suitably shocked throughout. There is a pianist.

A somewhat pretentious programme, well below the normal high standard of interest achieved by Mermaid publications, tells us that the "chant" of **Rafferty's Chant** is derived from the French *chanter* in its fraudulent connotation, and the idea of the play from the experiences of the author's uncle in Manchester in the 1930s. A car is "sold" three (almost four) times with the aid of a small ad and a bogus widow. The victims are sundry respectable suburbanites, hooked on cars and supposed skill in negotiation, the salesman a lawyer *manqué* with a chip on his shoulder. There are many "Theatre Workshop" speeches, plenty of action—though often to little purpose plot—or laughter-wise—and some amusing interludes when the unbelievable "widow" (Toni Palmer) agitates the tiny breast of the wife (Carmel McSharry—the only really well-observed character) of a flirtatious salesman (David Dodimead) out of his depth. But it's impossible to take the social comment seriously in the framework of so wildly improbable a story. Who would pay for a gaping, idiot-serviced bomb without seeing it, and much less after seeing it? It would have been better to abandon all pretence at realism and produce a surrealist fantasy with an imaginary car. That would have lost much of the farce, but you cannot have effective farce-plus-philosophy when both characters and setting are unconvincing. James Grout as Rafferty and director Robin Midgley seem, with some justification, nervous of their material unadorned.

David Storey's first play, after a distinguished career as a novelist, is doubtful psychiatry but good theatre. Arnold Middleton, a schizoid history master and secondary school producer, is in love with his mother-in-law, but even more with himself and his wild, deflating, image-filled, verse-strewn talk. His friend and colleague, head of the English department and in pursuit of the gym mistress *via* a precocious girl pupil, abets him in his nonsense till the night of a party when things get out of hand. With the help of a patient, practical wife some sort of "restoration" follows the inevitable crisis. The author's verse published in the programme suggests that the play is more than Freud in the suburbs but a Pirandello-type exploration of the nature of reality. Perhaps.

On the face of it, however, it seems a cleverly drawn, often funny, sometimes moving, picture of two men who escape their sexual inadequacies—and there is a suggestion that Middleton would prefer writing to teaching—by retreating into make-believe and cynicism. The play avoids the usual pitfalls of the novelist's drama and most of those of the poet's though the characters show rather too much indulgence in verse recitation. Andy Phillips and Bill Dufton's lighting is particularly good. Eileen Atkins, Noel Dyson, John Shepherd, Tenniel Evans, Andree Evans, Gillian Hills and their director Robert Kidd act as a perfect team.

## A JUROR LOOKS AT THE LAW

(Continued from page 228)

trying to relieve the miseries of women. And in cases where the operation is successfully performed with no unfortunate consequences to the women concerned, why should the police interfere?

If empanelled in cases like these, would I have the courage to find a person 'not guilty' who in my view had not committed a genuine crime? Probably not. And if I did have the courage, would this mean that I myself had committed a crime? Quite possibly.

In the event, pleas of guilty were tendered in both these cases so no jury was involved. The mother who killed her seven-week-old mongol son was put on probation for two years on condition she spent up to 12 months in a mental hospital. The Sheriff stated that what she did was wrong morally and legally, and by placing her on probation he did not want it to be thought that the court would be lenient in cases of this kind, except in exceptional circumstances . . . Prison would serve no constructive remedy.

'Earlier, the court was told that Mrs Bell was not fully responsible for her actions. She admitted a charge of culpable homicide. It was alleged she assaulted her son Ewan in her house on Dec. 5 by placing a pillow over his face and mouth and asphyxiated him.'

So this is the sort of tragedy to which some parents are condemned. One would hope for a change in the law to permit euthanasia on the request of parents. Obviously, if there were a good god in charge, no defective babies would be born. Man should try to bring about, in so far as lies within his power, the sort of community there would be if it were under the control of a good god.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Holidays, Art Holiday, Burton Galleries, Wirral Cheshire, 29th July to 12th August. Small Youth Camp near Yeovil, Somerset. Details of both from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service. For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, July 23rd, 11 a.m.: DR SAUL CROWN "Euthanasia".

National Secular Society (103 Borough High Street, London, SE1), Sunday, September 3rd. Tour of "London for Heretics". Coach fare, luncheon, refreshments: 25/-. Book now.

West Ham Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead, London, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

# LETTERS

## Free will

THE concept of "free will" is quite legitimate if one accepts the pre-scientific world view of the Christians and other believers in the supernatural. Since if there are actually two sides to reality—a material, natural realm, and a spiritual, supernatural realm—then while it may be true that our physical bodies are subject to natural laws, our 'souls' or 'spiritual breath from above' are not, but are independent, and possess 'free will'.

However, since modern science shows us that our minds (or 'souls') depend also on material factors and environmental influences, and would appear to be nothing without such determining forces, it would seem that the idea of 'free will' must be scrapped or modified.

But how do we account for the feeling that we are free agents? Perhaps to some extent this illusion is a result of Man's capacity for reflective thought, ie, there is a time-lag between initial determinants and final result; also the self-conscious summation of all relevant factors determining the final decision. Both these aspects give the illusion that the final result is a 'free choice' in the sense that no determinants are involved.

The term 'freewill' itself often seems to be misinterpreted as a confusion between 'freedom' and 'will power' and 'determinism'. Freedom is a political term meaning that an individual is not subject to slavery or such-like coercion by his fellows. It does not mean the absence of determining influences apart from this. Will power is the measure of the strength of the final result of determining factors acting through a conscious human being. It, also, does not imply the absence of the determining factors—although 'will' is used here to represent the summation of the determinants. Determinism itself does not necessarily mean that we are mechanical zombies, incapable of planning ahead, and that we must accept whatever Fate dishes out to us. This attitude is refuted by the simple fact that we can choose our futures—within the ambit of the determinants impinging on us.

The word 'freewill' in a modern scientific world is a denial of the universality of causality. Hence, either the one or the other of these two attitudes is mistaken. And since science is able to produce much more evidence for its case than religion, 'freewill' must go.

In its stead we may use the idea of Determinism and Determination, where Determinism means that all our thoughts and actions have prior causes of some sort, however random such influences may be; while Determination means will power, and measures the strength of our actions, etc., in the light of our decisions.

D. L. HUMPHRIES (Australia).

## Silent prayer in American Public Schools

SINCE praying in public schools has resulted in definite decisions of the USA Supreme Court, it seems unrealistic to leave the matter to the arbitrary decision of individual state teachers, principals, or even school boards. They are all capable of being biased in favour of a particular religious belief. This was shown in a public school teacher's recently-published letter which boasted of daily "silent devotions".

The intent of sponsored "silent prayer" or "silent devotions" is obviously to circumvent the spirit of the recent Supreme Court decisions. Circumvention is a dangerous thing, and such teaching is very poor training for students in obeying the law of the land, or in learning honesty.

The Supreme Court stated: "What may not be done directly may not be done indirectly lest 'the establishment clause' become a mockery".

Any sponsored prayers in Public Schools are a self-conscious and divisive act. They are also a violation of the right of parents to indoctrinate or not to indoctrinate their children in religion. Teachers in Public Schools are not hired to turn them into churches or Sunday Schools.

Many Christians sincerely believe in the Bible's instruction on prayer given in Mat. 6:6, and public prayer violates this. If a child wishes to make a silent prayer, he can do this on his own initiative at any time. But the forcing of any religious exercise, either silent or oral, on any captive audience, is not "the free exercise of religion".

Prayer is prayer, either silent or oral, and the Supreme Court stated that Public Schools may not sponsor prayer in any form. If "silent devotions" or "silent prayers" are sponsored in any USA Public Schools, the practice should be ordered to be stopped immediately by those in authority. WILLARD E. EDWARDS (USA).